

**2007: A 21st Century Farm Bill
The California Perspective
Listening Session
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State Capitol, Room 4202
Nutrition Panel

a presentation by

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Good afternoon, Members of the Panel:

My name is Rene Yamashiro. As president of the California School Nutrition Association, I'm speaking today on behalf of the more than 2,000 members of our Association who are responsible for the meals served in our schools.

More importantly, I'm speaking on behalf of the 6 million children in California who receive safe, nutritious meals at school, thanks to the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs and farmers who supply the food.

With issues such as poor nutrition and childhood obesity, a great deal of scrutiny is on the school meal programs. Our members welcome this scrutiny -- we also ask that equal scrutiny be given to the budgets and cost of program implementation.

Like Alaska and Hawaii, California's high cost of living increases the cost of the school meal — but Alaska and Hawaii receive adjustments from the federal government to offset their costs, keeping the lunch affordable. In California, it's even more expensive to produce a school meal. Yet, we receive no such adjustment. And ironically, a large number of low- to middle-income students can't afford to pay for the school meal, yet they don't qualify for a free or reduced-price meal, so many children go without lunch at all.

How can we expect our children to show high test scores when they're hungry?

Therefore, the California School Nutrition Association requests a statewide adjuster in the federal meal reimbursement rate similar to the adjustments received in Alaska and Hawaii.

The School Breakfast Program, established under the Child Nutrition Act of 1966, is designed to ensure that all children have access to a healthy breakfast at school to promote learning readiness and healthy eating behaviors. With an adequate supply of commodities, more California schoolchildren could start their day with a wholesome breakfast that includes milk, juice, grain, fruit and vegetables.

Therefore, the California School Nutrition Association joins the national School Nutrition Association in its request for ten cents per meal, ---to be provided in the form of USDA commodities--- for each school breakfast served.

We've all heard, "Breakfast is the most important meal of the day." The Cutler-Orosi Unified School District has proven this to be true.

Harvard Medical School conducted a study of the psychological and academic impact of school breakfast over an extended period of time. This study concentrated on the effects of providing free breakfast to school children and found that eating breakfast in school produced significant gains in academic and emotional function with positive effects on grades, attendance, behavior, and psychological test scores.

TO QUOTE THE RESEARCHERS:

“This relatively simple intervention can significantly improve children’s academic performance and psychological well-being.”

The students who regularly ate school breakfast had math grades that averaged almost a whole letter grade higher than the grades of students who rarely or never ate the school breakfast.

Members of the Panel, the infrastructure, equipment, facilities and personnel already exist to provide breakfast for all California children; but that’s not happening due to the institutional and financial barriers that we’re asking you to help us break down.

The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 authorized a pilot to test the effectiveness of using the WIC income guidelines as the free school meal guideline, thereby eliminating the reduced price meal category. In the 2005 House Agriculture Appropriation Report, USDA was encouraged to identify the funds necessary to implement the pilot, but regrettably, no action was taken.

Yet, for many hard-working, low-income families, that 40 cent cost of a reduced-price meal is more than they can afford.

Therefore, the California School Nutrition Association, along with the national School Nutrition Association, urges Congress to specifically appropriate approximately 30 million dollars to carry out the “ERP Pilot” program as authorized.

So, why should California Agriculture care about what's going on in the school cafeteria? Because --- aside from caring about kids -- schools are an enormous CUSTOMER.

The National School Lunch Program serves **4.9 billion** school lunches annually and **1.6 billion** school breakfasts. In addition to the millions of summer meals and after-school snacks that are provided across the nation.

And who's providing the food?

USDA purchases approximately **1.5 billion dollars of commodities from California alone for its food distribution programs**¹. And schools are the largest recipient of those commodities.

Increasing participation in school meal programs would increase sales for California agriculture.

Many people don't realize that sixty years ago, the National School Lunch Program was put in place to ensure that our young people were well nourished and able-bodied for the military. Today, we ask that you support our request for adequate school meals so that they can have a fighting chance at a successful education and a healthy life.

Thank you for your time, and thank you for inviting CSNA to speak.

¹USDA Commodity Distribution recipients include, but aren't limited to: National School Lunch Program, National School Breakfast Program, The Emergency Food Assistance Program, and others.